Devils & The Supernatural

(Is Rational Belief Possible?XXX)

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Brief Historical Remark

For a very long time Western philosophy was concerned with the existence of *God*, but religious belief has waned in historically Christian countries in the West, and explicit atheism has become a much stronger public option than it was when religious organizations had significant influence over governments and societies. McGill philosopher Charles Taylor aptly asks in his Gifford lectures for 1998-99, "Why is it so hard to believe in God in (many milieux of) the modern West, while in 1500 it was virtually impossible not to?" (*A Secular Age*, p. 539).

Religion and spirituality now evoke important questions in the West about the existence of any supernatural domain at all, not just questions about God. In an important survey of seven great religious theorists, Daniel Pals distils religion in their thinking as being "associated in some way with a supernatural realm, a sphere of divine or spiritual beings" (*Seven Theories of Religion*). The theorists he surveys are Sir James Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, Sir E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Sir Edward Tylor, and Clifford Geertz, some ~~of~~ ofvwhich have become household names.

The broader question about the existence of spirits, rather than simply God, is apparent in their studies, although colonial attitudes in the West have prevented some theorists from taking anthropological reports of spirits seriously. In other parts of the world spirits have been taken very seriously, and are hardly objects of

doubt. The reasons for these differences can be found in what is (perhaps mistakenly) called *The Enlightenment*. Perhaps the uncritical dismissal of spirits is beginning to break down in the West. *The Washington Post* recently described the encounters with "spirits and possession" by Richard Gallagher, a board-certified psychiatrist and a professor of clinical psychiatry at New York Medical College, who occasionally is involved in exorcisms conducted by clergy from many faiths. The ability of subjects to speak unlearned languages while in trance, and to know the most secret sins of others "cannot be explained except by special psychic or preternatural ability." (https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/07/01/as-a-psychiatrist-i-diagnose-mental-illness-and-sometimes-demonic-possession/?utm_term=.944b2ad85455)

Retroduction

When the existence of God was the focus of religion, people would demand *proofs* for God's existence. This demand really belongs to an ancient time in which people thought we might find First Principles that would be so indubitable that no one could doubt them, and that by a strict deductive process we could find propositions about spiritual matters. However, such proofs ~~now~~ are now widely construed by philosophers as belonging only to Mathematics, to Logic, and perhaps a very few branches of Science. The Laws of Nature are now thought to be probabilities, not certainties, and induction (probabilistic reasoning) is as large a component of science as deduction once was.

A third form of reasoning was recognized by the 19th century scientist and philosopher, Charles Saunders Peirce, as *retroduction* (sometimes called *abduction*),

and is gradually obtaining closer attention and sympathetic interest. He also referred to it as a form of guessing. In this form of reasoning, we observe some new phenomenon for which we have no explanation, and then postulate the existence of something that seemingly provides that explanation. While no one can plausibly offer a history of the thought of peoples concerning spirits and witchcraft, we can plausibly say that retroduction has been prominent in such attempts to explain events.

Many phenomena have occurred for which no explanation is at hand, so spirits –invisible beings or forces (generally) with some, if not all, of the perceptual and intellectual powers found in humans, but somehow more powerful than humans – have been postulated to provide that explanation. Retroduction can be irresponsibly used, since this order of thought is, strictly speaking, a formal fallacy: From ‘If p then q’ and ‘q’ ~~and~~

~~'If p then q'~~ we infer 'p', which is the Fallacy of Affirming the Consequent. ~~-~~However, to advance 'p' tentatively and cautiously, in testable ways, is to conjecture about features of the world that lie hidden to us. This is an essential part of the fabric of Science, and is not a misuse of logic. Such thinking is unquestionably present in religion.

Postulated Objects.

In an important document describing the human prevalence of postulating objects in order to create ~~a~~ helpful and compelling conceptual structures, Harvard philosopher W.V.O Quine writes about physical objects as such~~postulated~~:

"Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries – not by definition in terms of experience, but simply as irreducible posits

comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. For my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's god; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise."[1]

This remark is interesting for the epistemic status that Quine gives Homer's gods –spirits in general, we might say – observing that those who believe in their existence postulate them as a way of explaining experience, perhaps, comparable to some who took phenomenal experience (from senses, from memory, from imagination, from cognitive states, etc.) as best explained by the reality of physical objects.

When Quine wrote this book, philosophers were still widely discussing epistemic grounds developed by Rene Descartes and David Hume for thinking "that a real world independent of phenomenal experience really exists." This unhappy topic has largely disappeared in

[1] *From a Logical Point of View* (

the last sixty years, I think I am safe to say, and philosophers can assert without apology the real existence of physical objects. Quine also exhibits support for physicalism (known earlier as materialism), which has become the regnant ontological perspective among Western philosophers. The belief in spirits and ghosts is in sharp disagreement with this position, on which I will comment below.

Charmed Baryon Particle

Many entities have been postulated in order to account for phenomena, including elements in chemistry, first postulated to exist by virtue of “gaps” seen on the periodic table; “germs” as described by Ignaz Semmelweis; genes (known to Gregor Mendel as inheritance factors) in biology, which are now

observable; tectonic plates in geology; natural selection and other conjectured mechanisms advanced in evolutionary theory; a luminiferous aether through which light is transmitted, which is now considered nonexistent; the unconscious in psychology, as well as various “elements” of personality postulated by various personality theories.

In the diagram below we see the tracks on a photographic plate by virtue of which a charmed baryon particle was postulated to exist.[2] A neutrino (devoid of charge, hence without a track) that is not pictured in the photograph on the left, but corresponds to the dashed line at the bottom of the drawing on the right, enters the chamber (from the bottom) and collides with a proton (from the left). This collision produces three positive particles (labeled as 2, 3, and 5), two negative ones (1

[2] From Frank Close, et al, *The Particle Explostion* ; used with permission from The Lawrence Berkeley National Lab.

and 4), and a neutral one – the charmed baryon particle pictured by a dash and identified by the lambda (Λ). This baryon particle has an extremely short life, decaying within one-billionth of a second and producing a distinctive ‘V’ when it decays into a proton and a pi-meson (6 and 7). The existence of this particle is inferred from the set of observable events shown here.

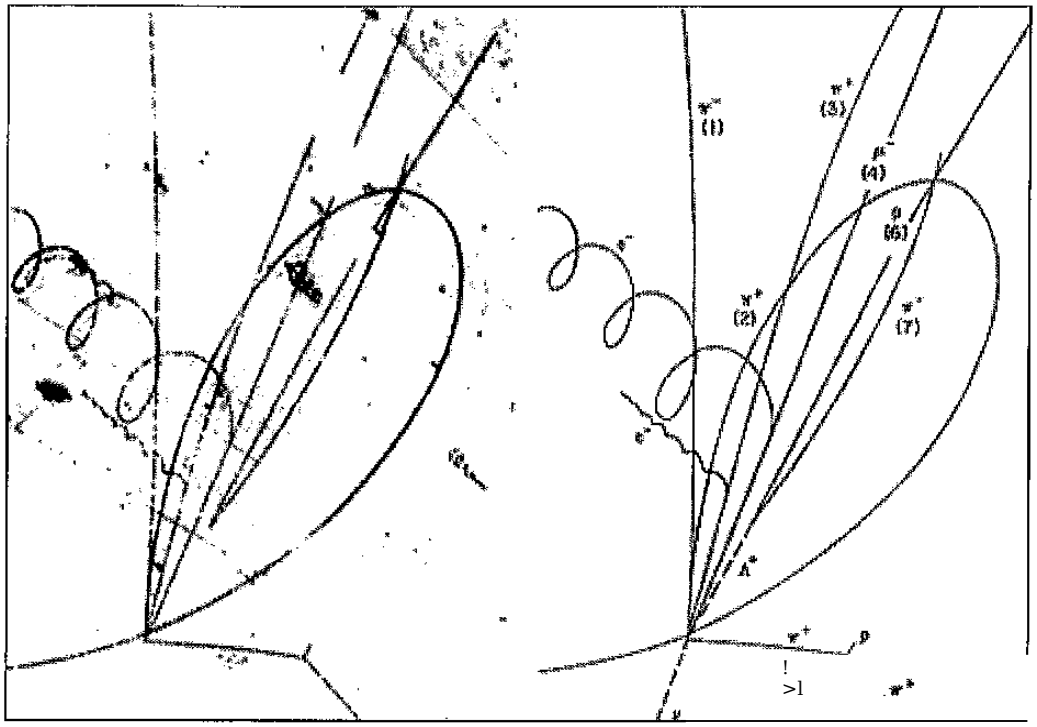


Figure 1

This experiment arguably establishes the (highly)

probable existence of charmed baryon. We might wonder if comparable phenomena ever occur in which spirits are postulated as causal agents.

Exorcism

The 1st century historian Josephus reports that Jewish exorcism in his day included an instruction to the exorcised demon to overturn a basin of water in order to prove to onlookers that it had indeed left.[3] Josephus says that he saw methods of exorcism attributed in Jewish tradition to King Solomon, used in his own day in the presence of Vespasian, the Roman emperor, but he does not say whether "the basin-test" was included. If a basin of water were indeed to be overturned at the appropriate moment in such a ritual, this would corroborate the claim that an invisible agent had been present, and would be epistemically comparable to the charmed-baryon example. Of course we would want assurance

[3] *Antiquities of the Jews,* bk. 8, ch. 2, para. 5.

that the basin was not turned over by some natural cause, for example, a gust of wind or an earth tremor.

The fact that this test for a successful exorcism was present in Jewish culture suggests that among its ‘theorists’ were those who construed the beings typically found in religious thought to be grounded in events belonging to the space-time-causal order. An observer of such a phenomenon would not need to be ‘religious’ in order to advance a tentative theory that postulated the existence of ‘a devil’, but would only need to be an observer of the natural order in which we find ourselves. Inasmuch as some benign power (in addition to the exorcised devil) acting through the rabbi-exorcist is seemingly present, this phenomenon gives us an unusually clear “picture” of two transcendent orders, seemingly not a part of physical nature itself. However, we might exercise caution in saying too much about

them, and let our theorizing be guided more by actual observation than by traditional descriptions, many of which focus on infinite attributes when describing the transcendent order traditionally described as *God*. We find a comparable allegation in the New Testament, where devils are said to have passed from men to swine.[4] The precise way in which postulated entities acquire their 'status' is unclear. While the postulated causal role is central, other links to things whose existence is not in doubt are likely involved as well, e.g., spatio-temporal or species-genus links.[5]

Science & Commonsense

The following diagram represents a rough view of the relation between the commonsense conceptual framework and the scientific domains that have grown

[4] I have discussed this at length in "Deliverance and Exorcism in Philosophical Perspective."
[5] See Robert Nola, "Fixing the Reference of Theoretical Terms," and Berent Enc, "Reference of Theoretical Terms," for discussion.

out of commonsense, as well as their relations to philosophy (reading it from the bottom to the top):

ETC

IV. Meta-philosophy, etc.

III. Philosophy ("Meta-science")

1. Aesthetics
2. Ethics, incl. Anthropology & Intrinsic Value
3. Epistemology
4. Ontology: Metaphysics & Philosophy of Natur
5. Logic & Methodology (Deduction, Induction, etc.)

II. Science & Exact Study:
a. Descriptions, b. Hypotheses, c. Theories (including unobservables) and
d. Paradigms

~~*Religion: Text, Ritual, Values, Experience, etc.* (?)~~

Arts & Literature: Interpretation

Sociology, History, Economics

Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Linguistics

Psychology (Persons): Individual & Social, & Cognitive Science

Biological: Functional & Historical

Chemistry: Inorganic & Organic

Physics: Particles/Waves & Fundamental Forces

[Mathematics]

I. Commonsense (including mind & spirit)
Events, and Sequences between them
Objects, Properties, & Relations
FIGURE 2

The sciences, including natural and social sciences, have derived from commonsense views of the world, which differ from culture to culture, but are largely inter-definable, and so seemingly describe "the same world." The natural sciences are often considered to describe the things that exist, and the laws governing their actions and interactions; this diagram also shows the familiar hierarchy from physics to chemistry to biology to psychology to other social sciences.[6] The wide arrow indicates that the conceptual or logical influence is from Commonsense (Level 1) to Science (Level 2), not the reverse, seemingly. I have placed Arts and Literature as

[6] An early expression of this is found in Paul Oppenheim & Hilary Putnam, "The Unity of Science as a Working Hypothesis" (1958).

a level of exact study that depends upon the levels below it. Much of its content is related to commonsense, but scientific concepts are increasingly found in it, as in science fiction. The recognized sciences themselves involve descriptions of phenomena, and explanations of~~in~~ hypotheses or theories, often embedded in paradigms that govern how descriptions and explanations are given. This results in descriptions being theory-dependent, perhaps to varying degrees. A curious feature of "descriptions" of exorcisms is that some seem to require reference to the entities postulated by the theory to explain phenomena. In this respect the descriptions of the phenomena associated with devils are extremely theory-dependent, so that descriptions and theory are presented together.[7]

[7] I have discussed this in "Finite Spirits as Theoretical Entities," *Religious Studies*, 40 (2004): 341-50.

Religion does not appear unambiguously on Figure 2, and that is how naturalism (or physicalism) as it is practiced in public universities in Western culture views religion – it has little or no place in the developed views of well-educated people, although acquaintance with *beliefs* about religion among those who practice it is encouraged. Religion is typically seen as a system of thought, rituals, beliefs, values, social structures, doctrines, etc. that is really about *nothing at all*. In 1965 Richard Rorty published an influential paper that had a bearing then upon the discussion of the nature of mind. Physicalists were exploring the possibility that everything characterizing our mental lives would be found to be much more comprehensively described in some future development of neurophysiology. Rorty advances a variation on this view by arguing that supposed references in ordinary language to mental phenomena would be *eliminated*, much as the theory of

demons, he claimed, had been successfully eliminated in Western thought.[8]

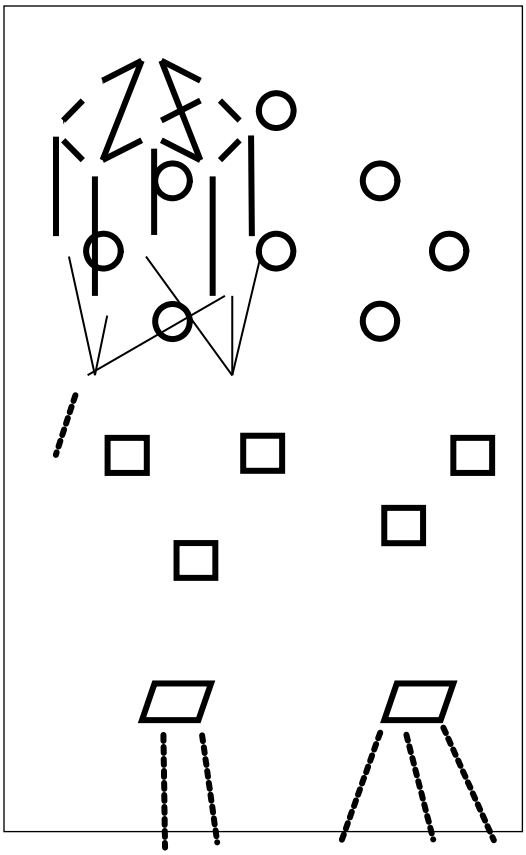
He portrays the theory of demons as having been advanced primarily to explain illness and certain kinds of apparitions, even though many other kinds of phenomena have been understood as explained by the existence of demons.[9] No reply to Rorty's claim concerning the theory of demons ever occurred, to my knowledge, and silence on the topic has probably reinforced the impression that the theory has no rational standing. In Figure 2 I refer to Commonsense as including mind (mental states) and spirit (spiritual phenomena). Mental states are being absorbed into neurophysiology, it appears, but no solid scientific counterpart to spirit exists. It has been eliminated, in the

[8] In 'Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories'.
[9] Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, in *Malleus Maleficarum*, identify more than seventy phenomena attributed to evil spirits in Western medieval times. This document, first published *circa* 1486, is perhaps the most influential document on the subject in Western history, and served for several centuries as an authoritative document in courts where witches were tried and convicted.

opinion of many. I will comment later on a possible "science of spirit."

Theory Structure

Central to theories postulating unobservable objects are questions about whether they are intelligible, testable, and realizable. Generic answers can be given to the first two of these questions, and they are important because they counter the view that meaningfulness (intelligibility) belongs only to claims about observables.



The circles in the diagram on the left represent unobservable objects postulated by a theory, such as particles in physics

The lines between circles represent postulates in which unobservable objects are conceptually related, such as accounts of atomic structures

The square boxes represent concepts defined using terms for observables, and the vertical lines connect defined concepts with unobservables; density is a concept in physics that is defined with reference to volume and mass, the latter of which is defined by atomic structures

The parallelograms represent concepts deriving from direct experience, connected to defined concepts by thin lines;

Figure 3[10]

When positivists challenged the intelligibility of theories a half-century (or more) ago, they isolated individual statements for critical scrutiny and could easily show

[10] Adapted from Herbert Feigl, "The "Orthodox" View of Theories: Remarks in Defense as well as Critique."

that particular statements might be neither verifiable, nor falsifiable, nor definable using an empiricist language (in which all non-logical terms denote either observable things, properties, relations, or events).[11] However, statements must be viewed within the theory of which they are a part, and the question must be put to *the theory itself*, not simply the components of it.

A historically important example comes from physics in which a luminiferous aether was postulated to exist to explain the propagation of light. An implication of the theory was tested in the Michaelson-Morley experiment in 1887, and the result was construed as undermining the theory, and with that the existence of the aether. This was not an assessment of a single proposition, but the assessment of a theory with many components, an implication of which was found to be faulty. The theory

[11] See Carl Hempel, "Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* **4** (1950): 41-63, for an overview of the strategies that had been developed in the first half of the 20th century, before logical positivism was abandoned.

was intelligible, shown in the fact that a direction in which to look for a test implication was understood. The theory was also testable, although we could describe this test as somewhat indirect. In Figure 3 we have a pictorial representation of unobservable objects, their properties, and relations between objects (expressed roughly in terms of concepts), in order to suggest the roles given to observables and unobservables in a theory postulating the latter.

Intelligibility

David Lewis, professor of philosophy at Princeton University for many years, contributed an important qualification to the way in which positivists understood theories postulating unobservables. His interest was directed to terms denoting mental states at a period of time during which the foundations for cognitive science were being put in place. Lewis argues that mental terms

in the language of ordinary language users – often described as the language of 'folk psychology' – can be defined by the causal role that their postulated referents typically play, and that the question whether mind might be *non-material* is irrelevant to the question whether mental terms have reference.[12] He observed that terms for unobservables typically have no intelligibility before a theory including those terms is proposed, but after the theory's proposal such terms do have meaning. This occurs in science fiction also,[13] and so is applicable to fiction in general: before a story is told a set of terms might have no intelligibility, but after it is told they do. Their intelligibility is provided by the large context into which they are inserted, where virtually all of the other terms already have intelligibility.

[12] 'Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications', 250f. Lewis also addressed these and related issues in 'An Argument for the Identity Theory', and 'How to Define Theoretical Terms.'

[13] Lewis, "Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications."

While I would not try to underestimate the role that causality has in giving the terms intelligibility, I think that many other relations contribute modestly. These include such ‘simple’ relations as those featuring time and space; moreover, relations of similarity, dissimilarity, analogy, and perhaps a myriad of others contribute to the conceptual spaces we create when postulating theories. I do not think we can ferret out exactly how terms for unobservables acquire intelligibility, so I do not think that classical empiricism associated with Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume is completely adequate. Our acquaintance with theories is generally profound enough that we can ‘tell at a glance’ whether we are looking at an intelligible one. Theories that postulate spirits are curious ones, for they have gotten applied to all sorts of phenomena for which they seem totally inapplicable. I will speak more to this excessive ‘flexibility’ below.

Testability

The testability of theories that postulate unobservables is a curious matter, and also one on which we do not have full insight. The discussions in philosophy of science are particularly relevant here, since it is these in which such theories have been most closely studied. We do well, I think, to try to get our bearings in well studied areas of knowledge, and then bring our insights to bear on fields of inquiry that are obscurer, or still in their infancy, such as religion.

In an important document about the webs of belief we create in order to orient ourselves intellectually, Quine and JS Ullian identify some principles that are widely used to evaluate theories, principles that go beyond the simple suggestion that we confirm a theory by finding an instance of it, or test it by exposing it to possible

falsification and finding that it is not falsified.[14] These principles include proposing theories that are:

1. Conservative
2. Modest
3. Simple
4. General
5. Not ad-hoc
6. Refutable
7. Formulated using projectible predicates (terms that are temporally stable, unlike “president,” say, which can be correctly applied to a person only part of the time)
8. Capable of receiving confirming and disconfirming evidence
9. Precise, as much as circumstances allow,
10. Formulated using expressions whose definitions are made precise

[14] Carl Hempel and Karl Popper are widely associated with these two notions, respectively, and their suggestions are not without merit.

11. Capable of being rendered probable

This list does not exhaust the possibilities that are sometimes suggested; indeed, reference to twenty more can readily be found in the literature of philosophy (mostly philosophy of science). Each principle is worthy of critical attention as part of Meta-philosophy. I am inclined to think that every field of inquiry would exhibit many of the principles that currently are in play, and that we would find strong similarities from one field to another, but we might find that identical weights are not given to them. This general feature of the structure of theories has not been adequately addressed.

Symbolic Logic

If we go ahead and grant that a theory of devils (or ~~f~~ spirits in general) is intelligible and also testable, the pressing remaining question is whether the theory has a realization, that is, whether some form of the theory is

more-or-less true of the world that we inhabit. In speaking to this third important question I wish to introduce some helpful insights into the structure of theories that come from symbolic logic. The logic that analytic philosophers generally use is not universally admired, especially among those who are new to philosophy and wonder if they should really subject themselves to the strictures exhibited by the logic of Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, and to non-analytic philosophers, perhaps. I think that some insights are to be found in it, especially if we consider the natural language (English, in my case here) in which one works to be translatable into the language of the symbolic logic.

For instance, the English sentence, ‘Every substance has a solvent (other than itself)’ becomes ‘(∀x)(Sx ⊃ (∃y)(Sy • x≠y • Dyx))’, where ‘Sx’ = ‘x is a substance’, ‘Dyx’ = ‘y dissolves x’, ‘x=y’ = ‘x is identical to y’, and the other

notation is standard logic for ‘every’, ‘if/then’, ‘some’, ‘and’, and ‘not’. If we think of a theory as a long conjunction of statements expressed in the notation of the logic (Prenex Normal Form), we can provide an equivalent expression of the theory in which all the quantifiers are removed and placed at the front, followed by an expression (often called *the matrix*) using only the predicates of the theory and the required logical operators. The sentence about the solvents of substances might turn out into something like ‘(y)(∃x)(matrix)’, where an existential quantifier on ‘x’ takes the place of the universal one in the original translation. The outcome of each embedded variable needs to be proved on its own, but the principle of removing all quantifiers, followed by the matrix to yield an equivalent expression, is a theorem of the logic.

The group of existential quantifiers at the beginning make assertions about what is real, and when it comes to the world of devils and other spirits, mistakes can easily be made – we might assert the existence of a devil or an angel (or a given kind), but be mistaken if that putative being does not exist at all. Of course the same mistakes can be made in any ccomparable theory from the undisputed natural order; however, we might not feel that the existential claim is nearly as weighty when doing physics or evolutionary theory. Claiming that something exists, when it does not, and failing to claim the existence of something that is real are, comparatively speaking, reasonably significant errors. Less grievous errors appear to occur when we ascribe the wrong predicate to a thing, or fail to note a relation between an unobservable object and an observable object – mistakes only in the matrix. Here we have a rough guide to the notion that one theory might be modestly flawed,

whereas another theory is seriously wrong. These notions apply to a theory of spirits as much as to any other theory postulating the existence of unobservable objects. So the real question about theories of devils and other spirits is whether any one of them (or close variations) have a realization (are true) in our world.

Supernatural Worlds

C. S Lewis, British medievalist, novelist, and Christian apologist, describes the metaphysical commitments in *The Discarded Image* of Christian Europe during the medieval era. The world of transparent globes was thought to be inhabited by beings and powers of different ranks and powers, including three hierarchies of angels, as described by pseudo-Dionysius.[15] Humans were thought to form a second kind of rational being,

[15] *The Discarded Image*, p. 70f. Some historians place Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchies* in the sixth century, but Lewis evidently thinks it is earlier. Disputes about authorship have led to 'pseudo' being attached to 'Dionysius'. Modern commentators, unlike medieval authors, do not think he is the Dionysius from Athens mentioned in the New Testament (*Acts of the Apostles* 17:39).

their souls naturally considered immaterial, immortal, and possibly created along with the angels, well before the creation of Adam.[16] Lewis notes that rival views also existed about a third kind of rational being variously known as elves, pygmies, gnomes, trolls, pans, fairies, hags, satyrs, faunes, water-spirits, centaurs, dwarfs, nymphs, bogies, and by other terms. These longaevi – creatures having long life – were believed by some to live on earth, by others to live in the air.[17] Lewis remarks that he once stayed at a lonely place in Ireland that was avoided by the local people, not simply because the place was thought to be haunted by a ghost, but because fairies were said to lurk nearby.[18] He identifies several views of the longaevi among medievalists, including some who thought them identical to the daimons (or daemons) of Greek antiquity, whereas others considered

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[16] *Ibid.*, p. 155.
[17] *Ibid.*, chap. VI. See Janet Bord, *Fairies*, for a recent attempt to document their existence.
[18] A study of Icelandic folk-beliefs in 2014 showed that more than 60% of Icelanders believe that fairies exist.

them either spirits of the dead or a special class of the dead.

“The real question about theories of devils and other spirits is whether any one of them (or close variations) have a realization in our world”.

It is clear from a moment’s reflection, I think, that competently advocating the truth of one theory of spirits over competitors is impossible. Too many variants on one broad theme are now in view, and Western civilization is eager to distance itself from this part of its history. The naturalism that is regnant is obviously preventing much of this disputed theory from re-entering Western thought. Its educational institutions and its churches, ironically, are confederates in keeping the lid on devils and the “witches” said to be in league with one another.

Witches

If the existence of devils and spirits is a pressing question to which the answer to it is ‘Yes’, an equally pressing question is whether we can identify humans who somehow harness their power, or know enough about their ways that these can be predicted with some precision. I suppose that we could call these people ‘witches’ or ‘divines’, although this might not be the usual denotation (or connotation) of these terms, and for those who think that they are only involved with benign (or divine) influences the first of these terms might give offense – however, I do need some handy referring expressions. My impression is that those who think that they are in touch with, or can harness the power of spirits, or can predict their actions (of whatever sort), are often unsure about the source of their insights or powers. The pressing question is whether the claims of those who think they are in touch with the supernatural

actually know what they are in touch with, and whether they can withstand the influence of the opposite group. I am assuming here that no more than two kinds of supernatural power are dangerous or intimidating, but my capacity to speak on this matter is very limited. Having admitted the reality of spirits, I am hard pressed to speak with much knowledge of how they act, and interact.

“Educational institutions and its churches, ironically, are confederates in keeping the lid on devils and the “witches” said to be in league with one another”.

The difficulty that emerges here is establishing a causal connection between a human being and some event that harnesses supernatural powers in which they have a causal role. I made reference above to the work of

Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger published as *Malleus Maleficarum*, who mention more than seventy phenomena associated with diabolical activity. They claim to have witnessed such phenomena as the teleportation of objects, for instance, supposedly brought about by demonic powers. One of these allegedly occurred after a devout woman in the city of Spires engaged in heated conversation with a woman suspected of being a witch.[19] Fearing what the supposed witch might do, the devout woman sought to secure her child's safety when putting it to bed that night by sprinkling it with holy water and signing it with the cross. In the middle of the night she heard the child cry, and going to its cradle to comfort it, she found that the child was not there. She finally found the child in a corner under a chair, crying but unhurt. Kramer and Sprenger say that this incident occurred the year the work on their~~ir~~ book ~~was~~ begun, but they do not indicate whether they obtained the information firsthand.

[19] *Ibid.*, pt. II, ques. 1 (p. 91).

Neither do they indicate why they consider the suspected witch to have been the cause of the child's having been removed from its cradle. They do not offer reasons for rejecting the suggestion that some other person moved the child, for example, and they do not speculate about the possibility that the woman removed the child herself while she sleep-walked. They exhibit too much credulity at many points, but they also describe some cases that appear to be on better footing.

They give a second example of teleportation reported to them by a friend who was a priest in Oberdorf.[20] The priest reported that a group of scholars met for a beer, and agreed that the one who fetched the beer would not have to pay for it. One of them went to fetch the beer, but returned in terror a short while later, reporting that he had seen a thick cloud before the threshold of the public house. A companion replied, "Even if the devil was

[20] *Ibid.*, pt. II, ques. 1, chap. 3 (p. 105).

there, I shall fetch the drink." Upon saying this he was "carried through the air in the sight of all the others ⋯ arms stretched out, shouting but not whimpering." The second example is more impressive than the first in several obvious ways. The events reported in the first story were evidently seen only by the mother of the child, while those involving the drinking scholars are said to have been seen by all. Moreover, in the second example, unlike the first, the events are close together in time, reinforcing the impression that they are causally connected. Also, the second example involved several participants, for the first man who went to fetch the beer "saw a thick cloud," and his companion is said to have been spirited away. Events that involve a group of participants have features that link them to the space-time-causal domain more strongly than those involving lone individuals. The most pressing question about the

second story is whether we should accept its authenticity – maybe the scholars had imbibed too much beer!

A case of teleportation that seems much better attested than those found in *Malleus Maleficarum* is that of St. Joseph of Copertino. This 17th century friar, said to be in no other way remarkable, was reported to have been seen to fly by hundreds of witnesses, among whom were many influential and respected people, including a Pope, two kings, the Duke of Brunswick and the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz.[21] The source of this power is evidently deemed to be~~have~~ divine~~, , however,~~ not demonic. The method by which these powers are distinguished, once both are conceded to exist, is unclear. We can perhaps understand why the modern age has decided to abolish both orders.

[21] Malcolm Godwin, *Angels*, p. 223f.

In some parts of the world, other than the West, beliefs in devils and witches are widespread, influential, and sometimes out of control. In some places these beliefs appear to be flimsy grounds for the suppression of women, who are accused of being witches without the kind of careful evidence needed in wielding a theory capable of deadly actions towards those accused of witchery, and of wreaking considerable havoc in society. It is one thing to declare oneself a witch (or wizard, or shaman, or prophet, whatever the appropriate term might be), and quite another to be accused of being a witch in a political regime that has little control over the abusers of power. Here the religion-dominated societies come into view, offering incentive for the creation of liberal democracies in which many views are allowed to flourish, and where courts (try to) protect people from dangerous allegations. An additional layer of protection is often provided by medical agencies, in which those

accused of witchery and the ‘bewitched’ have access to psychiatric assessment and treatment, rather than risk a fiery death. All the theories that postulate unobservable objects are capable of being used in an irresponsible way, but few affect human feelings and consequently human irrationality in so profound a way as the theory of devils, and spirits in general. I can understand naturalism’s reluctance to allow this theory to be readmitted into the panoply of defensible theories.

In Figure 2 I sketch a mostly familiar outline of dependencies among theories, and I offer a place to religion if the phenomena that seemingly have been the source of this belief-system were to be given systematic treatment. Accounts from around the world and across time would be treated with both sympathy and criticism, similar to the attitude that Aristotle exhibited in critically reflecting on dreams in *On Prophesying by Dreams*. I

place religion above psychology and social sciences because it requires familiarity not only with views of the human person, but also with social and economic structures, with anthropology, with language, and innumerable other fields of study. Although I am open to reduction in all the familiar forms that it has taken in the study of scientific theories, I do not consider reduction to be a requirement of any field of inquiry – if we can find a legitimate reduction, why not take it, but insisting upon it before it is in hand seems premature.

Each field of inquiry has its ontological posits, whether these are races, ethnicities, social structures, language groups, economic structures, nations, and so on. Without these the social sciences could not be undertaken, but we cannot say exactly how these ontological posits will fare in the long run. We give them credence so that such sciences can proceed, and we can extend the same

> courtesy to religion, by construing spirits as legitimate posits, and by understanding the structures of religion with this accommodation in mind. Maybe spirits will be found to be devoid of evidential support, but we cannot pretend that evidence for their reality exists, nor can we advance a respectable naturalism without giving them a chance.

A Modern Account

Medieval accounts of spiritual phenomena are often met with incredulity by those of a modern disposition. The following account, by contrast, is within living memory, and derives from the Research Center on Religious Experience begun by Sir Alister Hardy at Oxford, now located in Lampeter, Wales. It has more than 6000 first-hand accounts of experiences taken to be religious or spiritual. An Anglican priest, who will be identified here as William, provided the following account of an

exorcism that is said to have taken place in the Rhineland, Germany, in 1947. The person who underwent exorcism will be identified as Nathan, and the witness to the event will be identified as Thomas.[22]

> "On the last evening of the Rhineland Keswick Convention three of us set out, at about 10:15 p.m. for a walk through a small wood which led to a village on the other side. Nathan, one of the party, started to tell the story of his life, and when we came to a clearing in the wood Thomas suggested that we should sit down for awhile. Nathan continued to relate his story. On joining the Royal Air Force he had missed the influence of home, and fell into bad company, unable to resist temptation. As Nathan finished his story there was silence. I sat with my eyes closed, wondering how I, as one of the convention

[22] Item 000248 in the data base.

leaders, could help the young fellow. What happened next was over in a very short space of time. Breaking through the silence, and crashing through the darkness with tremendous power came my voice, “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ depart.” Immediately Nathan let out a half shout, and fell towards me. He said afterwards, “At those words I saw a black form appear from somewhere at my feet and vanish into the wood, and, at the same time, something indescribable left me (…).”

“I felt an urgency for prayer, and if Nathan did not pray, something would happen to him. It was at this point an event occurred so dreadful that since I have prayed that it should never happen again. It seemed as if horrifying pandemonium had been let loose; as if all the powers of hell were concentrated in that spot in the wood. I saw

numbers of black shapes, blacker than the night, moving about and seeking to come between myself and Nathan, whom I was gripping hard. I saw three demon spirits, perhaps more, between Nathan and myself. These shapes were intelligences. They were different from one another. Each had a personality of its own. They began to buffet me, not striking me physically, but thrusting me backwards in spirit away from Nathan so as to make me recoil, perhaps from fear, and so loose my hold. Two other demon spirits, about shoulder high, were just behind me, one on my right, the other on my left. These two were moving about with a swaying, menacing up-and-down motion, such as boxers use when seeking an opening for attack. Again I felt an intense urgency for prayer, particularly for Nathan. “Pray Nathan,” I called to him, but the

poor fellow could do nothing but sob. With my hands on my shoulders I cried, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” Again and again I repeated the phrase. I did not notice that Thomas was silent until he said, “What a horrible atmosphere.” “Pray Thomas,” I commanded. “Pray for us.” Together we cried with a loud voice, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” Then, after a pause, in a colossal voice such as I have never heard before or since came a verse from Scripture through my lips in terrifying power. The words were forced out of my mouth, “I give to my sheep eternal life; they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” I was left absolutely gasping after this. My mouth had been stretched open wider and wider, as if the words were too big for my lips to utter. I then led with the Lord’s Prayer.

> For Thomas this was a real climax. He saw nothing, but again felt the atmosphere change. As we reached the words, “Deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory” the feeling of power was immense. The atmosphere was charged with a living presence, impossible to describe. Then everything grew quiet. The air seemed soft and pleasant, as if angel voices were singing, as if a battle had ended, or a great storm had blown itself out. Nathan whispered, “Praise God, Oh what joy.” (…)
>
> “We made our way back to the conference centre. Nathan could not wait until morning to share the news of his deliverance. Quite independently, Nathan told of how he had seen seven black forms emerge from the trees in the wood, and

> how he felt some power pushing him forward out of my grip."

The Research Center made contact with Thomas about the incident, but he refused to give further details, even though he had written a full account at the time it occurred. He evidently did not object to the account given above, and his silence can perhaps be cautiously interpreted as giving consent to the gist of what was reported. Several remarkable matters stand out in this account: (a) It involves intersubjective observation regarding "black forms" that evidently represent diabolical forces, (b) phenomenological details from William reveal something of the power felt in exorcising Nathan, details that are not present in the New Testament, and perhaps are not widely shared or known, (c) the sharp contrast between diabolical

powers and a Divine Being~~divine owes~~ is present again, as though each is more clearly seen by way of contrast with the other, and (d) the observable features and the phenomenological features are woven together, thereby creating a substantial ontological addition to the cosmos, from the mundane events that fill our lives and even our sciences.

Paranormal Phenomena

I have argued that claims about "supernatural orders" are intelligible, testable, and that they might have a realization in our world. The pressing question is whether enough evidence has been collected to give credibility to this ancient and medieval view. I personally credit near-death experience (NDE) with having awakened the modern world to the possibility that one or two features of the "enchanted cosmos" have credibility,

namely, that some form of “existence” might follow the death of one’s physical body, and secondly, that a life-review with some Being having omniscience about us and our activities in ordinary physical life might occur. This does not give us witches, divines, and the like, but it is a wedge in the door. The information about NDE is so extensive that to ignore it is to bury one’s head in the sand, for something like 4-5% of the people in parts of the world well served by medical technology experience NDEs along the lines first delineated by Raymond Moody in 1975.[23] It is something of an irony that modern technology from the modern world is helping to revive an ancient and medieval portrayal of human life.

Other kinds of studies need to be mentioned, including the work of Emma Heathcote-James on angels. Her study of modern encounters with beings taken to be angels, which was part of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Birmingham, drew on 800 first-hand

[23] *Life After Life.*

accounts. This adds substantially to the common knowledge of angel-encounters around the world. We need to add to this all the allegations of hauntings, spirit encounters, apparitions, and exorcisms, all of which contribute something to the data base on which traditional religious beliefs rest. This data is not collected in one place, to my knowledge, and faces two important tests: (a) how credible are individual claims, and consequently, how credible is any class of evidence generally deemed spiritual or religious, and (b) how much weight does a class of credible claims carry for the reality of a supernatural order. A science of religion is waiting to be discovered, described, and critically evaluated. The belief in spirits, and in witches and divines capable of acting in concert with them, or thwarting them, is conceptually coherent, and seems evidentially supportable by reference to religious experience claimed by people worldwide.

Footnotes & References

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